

# The development of the multilateral trade regime

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**The Development of the Multilateral Trade Regime –  
Exploring Institutional Change**

1. Institutional change is best conceived to work according to a logic of ‘history dependent rationality’ instead of ‘full rationality’. This implies that rational institutionalism provides powerful theoretical assumptions, which need to be supplemented by an understanding of contextual factors that influence institutional change in a given historical trajectory.
2. Empirical process tracing, embedded in the wider context of an institution’s historical development, is a methodological necessity to fully understand the causes and dynamics of a given episode of institutional change.
3. To understand the institutional architecture of an international organization, it is indispensable to think in terms of design sets, consisting of different variants of centralization and control.
4. The GATT’s idiosyncratic historical development ensured that being ‘member driven’ has become a self-reinforcing norm of the governance of the multilateral trade regime.
5. Consensus decision-making is the worst approach to take legislative decisions in the trade regime, except for all the others.
6. Several episodes of institutional change in the trade regime highlight that power asymmetries can be an important factor to establish a particular interpretation of rationality in institutional design.
7. Institutional change is path dependent. Many of the institutional changes that resulted from the Uruguay Round can be interpreted as tipping points, which were based on the existing institutional structures that had incrementally developed throughout the trade regime’s history.
8. By relying on historical experience, many Uruguay Round negotiators underestimated the effect of dispute settlement reforms, which was conducive to bring about the high degree of centralization that characterizes the WTO’s dispute settlement system.
9. It seems more feasible to address the trade regime’s current institutional problems by making use of existing institutional structures in different ways than by thorough institutional reform.
10. Wenn man die Fähigkeit erlangen will ein Instrument zu spielen, dann muss man dies nicht *können* wollen, man muss es *lernen* wollen.
11. Always look on the bright side of life.